



HEAR INTERIM APPLICATION FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. **Is HEAR for civilian employees only, or also for classified employees?**
 - a. Contract and Temporary employees, as well as Level 26 (executive level) and above are not subject to annual assessments. Refer to AP 3-20, §5.1
2. **Can two (2) plans be open for one employee at the same time (this year's and last year's)?**
 - a. No. Previous plans must be closed out for several reasons. First, the purpose of HEAR, to quote the mayor, "is to reduce the subjectivity of evaluations". If an old plan, former plan, or previous plan no longer applies to the employee, it should be closed out as a "Unscheduled Assessment" and a new plan created and assessed at the appropriate time.
3. **What is the character limit in the Task and SMART Goal Description fields, as well as the comments field for each (Employee, Manager/Supervisor, and Reviewing Authority)?**
 - a. 500 for the Task field, 1500 for the SMART Goals Description field
4. **Why does the SMART Goal Description field only all the Rating Score to show, but not the Remarks?**
 - a. This was a design issue that has been resolved since this question was raised
5. **When entering the Template, why can't each of the 5 measurements be on a separate line to make it easier to view, find, and complete?**
 - a. To accommodate this, the program is designed to have comments separated by a semicolon (;), Ensure that as you complete one line item or what you are trying to, you insert the appropriate punctuation. If you enter a period (.), you will find that your comments are indiscernible from each other
6. **The HEAR Interim Application apparently does not have the ability to weight SMART Goals according to importance of the function or duty. This gives an incorrect numerical assessment of performance.**
 - a. Incorrect. If you enter the employees' SMART Goal Criteria in the order of importance as determined by you (the manager or supervisor of said employee), you will populate the field with the numerical value for each aspect of the task you are assessing. For example:
 - i. The employee in question works for Parks & Recreation, and is a member of a crew that manicures green space, esplanades, etcetera. Given that this is both a crew **and** a singular employee for this example, the same template can be used for both the crew and the employee.
 - ii. The employee's SMART Goal Criteria Description field can be populated and weighted in this manner: **5 Exceptional** – Manicures **100+** acres of city park space during each 13-week period with **0** call backs for discrepancies in service. Maintains all equipment with **0** failures and **0** lost equipment during same period. Maintains equipment logs with **0** discrepancies during same period. **4 Exceeds Expectations** - Manicures **50 - 99** acres of city park space during each



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13-week period with **1** call back for discrepancies in service. Maintains all equipment with **1** failure and **0** lost equipment during same period. Maintains equipment logs with **1** discrepancy during same period. **3 Meets Expectations** - Manicures **26-49** acres of city park space during each 13-week period with **1-2** call backs for discrepancies in service. Maintains all equipment with **1-2** failures and **0** lost equipment during same period. Maintains equipment logs with **1-2** discrepancies during same period. **2 Below Expectations** - Manicures 10-25 acres of city park space during each 13-week period with **2-3** call backs for discrepancies in service. Maintains all equipment with **2-3** failures and **0** lost equipment during same period. Maintains equipment logs with **2-3** discrepancies during same period. **1 Needs Improvement** - Manicures **10 or less** acres of city park space during each 13-week period with **4+** call backs for discrepancies in service. Maintains all equipment with **4+** failures and **0** lost equipment during same period. Maintains equipment logs with **4+** discrepancies during same period.

- b. The above example shows how to construct a SMART Goal in that the example is **Specific** in that it tells the employee both what is expected as it relates to the job, as well as what will earn the employee the coveted '5'; it is **Measurable** in that it provides exact amounts of acreage, equipment maintenance, and log maintenance that are being assessed; **Attainable** in that these numbers were likely established based on either/both the employee/crew's past performance, and not contrived to prevent the employee from achieving a score they pursue; **Relevant** in that the tasks are all something that are reasonably expected from an employee and crew that maintain(s) green space; **Time-based** in that the assessment cycle (which is an entire year) is broken into segments of time that can be met or exceeded with relatively low difficulty versus having the employee (in this case) project over an entire calendar year. Given that an employee's rating score is based on a 50% weight contribution from both SMART Goals and Behavior Factors, the employee's SMART Goal is properly worded and properly weighted, allowing the HEAR Interim Application to properly distribute scores based on manager or supervisor input.
- 7. Once an employee checks the box 'Employee Refuses to Sign', can anybody make changes?**
- a. No. It becomes a matter of record that the employee has opted not to sign; however, the work must continue to be done. It is envisioned that employees may opt not to sign, as has been done in the past. However, how HEAR differs from past applications in this scenario is that it has been mandated in the AP 3-20 that managers or supervisors **must meet** with their employees no less than four (4) times per year. These meetings would include a strategic first meeting where the manager or supervisor will discuss the employee's capabilities, past performance, etcetera, and the Performance Work Plan



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will be discussed, thereby reducing the possibility that the employee would have a reason to opt not to sign.

- b. However, once the PWP has reached the employee for their signature, it has already passed through the Reviewing Authority as well for signature. The manager and Reviewing Authority have presumably already had discussions concerning the PWP and the departmental goals, how they align with the Mayor's Priorities and the employee's Plan and how it aligns with the Mayor's Priorities. There is no new information by this point, nor any surprises.

Once signatures have been applied, there is no changing of anything. The intent behind this is to ensure data integrity and to eliminate the possibility of inconsistencies between what the manager has provided the employee with respect to expectations, and to prevent the employee from making a claim they were unaware.

- 8. I have concerns with employees having access to the HEAR Application after the Supervisor and Reviewing Authority approve the final review. The employee will be able to make comments before the HEAR Performance Review. Ideally, the Performance Review should be held to clarify the information; then, the employee can comment as needed.**

- a. Employees cannot enter comments until both the supervisor and Reviewing Authority have signed.

- 9. I work at the jail where there are 40+ jailers on one shift, and 6 sergeants. The jailers are cross-trained and work in different areas each day. Should the sergeants (First-level Supervisors) create a uniform list of requirements for the evaluation so that all of the jailers are reviewed on the same factors? This could carry over to all three shifts if this is possible.**

- a. Great question! You actually have presented a scenario that fits perfectly with one of the core functions of the HEAR Interim Application. You may have wondered initially why there is not a 'Create Assessment' button on the Menu Bar; your question is the answer. The 'Templates' button on the Menu Bar is so you can build a template that is effectively suitable for application to 1 – 1,000,000 + employees who do the same thing. While the employees may all do the same thing, they may not all accomplish the same amount of stuff, nor have the same attitude doing so. That is where the scores come into play. If you refer to FAQ #6 for the example of a SMART Goal that breaks down the requisites for meeting certain scores, it makes it possible for the manager or supervisor to score employees who do the *same kind* of work against other employees who may not do *as much* work, or do their work with the same level of quality or attitude.

Remember the old adage, 'service with a smile'?

- 10. Is it possible to give the Reviewing Authority the ability to change the rating of an assessment if they feel that the employee deserves a different rating? (They have seen proof that the employee has done better and the rating manager has a bias)**



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- a. No. As a function of managing and supervising, the manager or supervisor performing the assessment should be most aware of his/her employee. It is possible that the RA has knowledge of something in favor of the employee, but the effective manager or supervisor has firsthand knowledge of the entire assessment period with regard to the employee. Additionally, the effective manager or supervisor has been instructed throughout the implementation of HEAR to maintain documentation concerning their employees, as have the employees been instructed to do the same. As Mayor Parker stated in her introduction video, "...HEAR is designed to reduce the subjectivity of annual assessments..." While there may be a bias on the part of the rating manager, each aspect of the assessment is accompanied by supporting or mitigating commentary, as well as an overall comment by all parties. Lastly, there are no changes permitted once a signature has been electronically applied to maintain data integrity.
- 11. How will part-time or Park & Recreation employees with no email address access the HEAR Interim Application to review their Performance Work Plan, Sign, and Save them?**
 - a. HITS is still addressing the email address issue and should have a resolution soon. In the interim, those employees who fit this scenario will be presented with a hard copy (paper) of their PWP and Final Assessment, which will be submitted in a traditional manner until the email issue has been resolved.
- 12. Is a complete list of Behavioral Factors available outside of the drop-down in the Application?**
 - a. Yes. You can find a complete list in the HEAR Reference Manual, pages 20 – 23.
- 13. Since the new process (HEAR) represents only a slice of a person's job description (i.e. limit of (4) SMART Goals), how do we hold a person accountable for the balance of the job description?**
 - a. While not intended to reduce or eliminate accountability for anyone's job, HEAR is intended to have supervisors and managers focus on what *is* done by the employee. Thus, supervisors and managers are empowered to determine what aspect(s) of a job is something they would prefer their employee be held "accountable" for completing. As a manager or supervisor, your employee should not have so many other things to do that they cannot invest *some* time into all aspects of their position.
- 14. Is a HEAR Performance Work Plan needed/required for part-time employees?**
 - a. No. They are optional for those managers or supervisors.
- 15. How will all Senior Inspectors match with other Senior Inspectors in the same group?**
 - a. This is not required, but certainly the supervisor, manager, or Reviewing Authority can establish this standard.
- 16. (A question in reference to Inspector Duties) Can each job duty be listed separately in the Task box and assigned its own SMART Goals Criteria Description?**



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- a. As many as desired can be selected in the SMART Goals Criteria Description for the 2012-2013 HEAR Assessment close-out, but should group like-tasks together for the 2013-2014 Assessment cycle, as the application will limit to four (4) SMART Goals.
- 17. Can you select only one choice under a specific category within the Behavioral Factors; i.e., under customer focus, I only want to choose “meet the expectations and requirements of internal and external customers.” I don’t want to include all the other chores that are included under customer service**
 - a. You may have noticed that there are now 19 BFs as opposed to the 26 that existed in Performance Impact. Some of them were rolled into others and may include things you don’t want to assess your employee on. You should note (in the Supervisor/Manager Comments/Observation space provided) that your employee is/was not observed for the following Behavior Factor _____; provided commentary that he/she is excluded from observation from those BFs when you make your Supervisor/Manager remarks for the score that the employee earned. Just because the employee isn’t required to do all of the actions in a particular category should not mean that their score should go down as a result of not being observed doing it. However, providing comments covers you and the employee will likely understand that the score they earned is based on ‘x’ or ‘y’, but was not observed doing ‘z’, and is scored accordingly.
- 18. Rating criteria should provide for ranges rather than round, hard numbers; this was a feature of Performance Impact I found helpful. An employee may not be a 5, but he/she can be a 4.5.**
 - a. While the HEAR Interim Application does not allow for ranges between whole numbers, you are correct in stating that an employee may not be a 5, but can be a 4.5. The rating manager/supervisor would accomplish this by rating the employees’ individual accomplishments on the scale you mention. For example, if the employee has 4 SMART Goals, but only 3 Behavior Factors, each would be rated individually. That is to say that if on each individual SMART Goal, the employee was a 5 on this one, a 4 on this one, a 4 on this one, and a 3 on this one, the application would average the employee’s scores, thus allowing the employee to be a 5, or 4.5 as the example suggests.
- 19. Allow for more flexibility time in being able to meet with employees to discuss final ratings. Once it’s locked and you can’t go back in to make changes, it’s cumbersome.**
 - a. Time is dictated by two factors with respect to both HEAR Work Plans and HEAR Assessments: a 15-day calendar clock that starts the moment the manager/supervisor applies his/her digital signature, and, the AP 3-20. For the 2012-13 Assessment Cycle, the mayor extended the deadline from April 30 to June 30 for non-supervisory personnel to coincide with the end of the fiscal year, and, to give supervisors/managers more time to complete the assessments with their employees using the HEAR Interim Application. However, it is incumbent upon the supervisor/manager to be cognizant of whether they have held any face-to-face meetings with their employees, and if not, to



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take the opportunity to have one with their employees to discuss their assessment.

Ideally, an employee would not be signing their Plan/Assessment without having either spoken to their supervisor/manager ahead of time, or having their supervisor/manager present at the time the employee is about to apply his/her digital signature.

20. How many times can you attempt to log-in before you are locked out of the application?

- a. There is no limit at this time

21. Can a hard copy of the HEAR Work Plans/Assessments be printed out?

- a. Yes. Printing is a function of the application; however, with access available 24-hrs a day, 365 days a year with internet access, the user can and should access the application and review it electronically to avoid unnecessary printing and maintenance of paper copies where possible.

22. Once you have assigned a template to an employee, can the template be changed and will the changes automatically reflect on the template assigned to the employee?

- a. **Changes can be made to the template up to the moment the employee signs and saves it.** This is accomplished by clicking the 'Edit' button in Step 2: Building Template Content, making your desired changes, and then clicking the 'Update' button. As long as the employee has not signed and/or saved their HEAR Plan/Assessment, he/she can simply click the link in their email informing them that their Plan/Assessment needs their signature, and it will take **them to the correct one.**

23. Can training be provided at other locations?

- a. Unfortunately, training is centrally located at the E. B. Cape Center as of the conclusion of the HEAR Day @ the Library event. There are not enough resources (trainers) available to accommodate training outside of the Cape.

24. Should templates be named according to employees, or should a single template be built and assigned to multiple employees?

- a. **Supervisors/managers own the templates;** if naming the template(s) makes it easier to assign to a particular employee, there is nothing wrong with naming it accordingly. However, because the supervisor/manager owns the template and may want to use the template in the future, but may no longer have that employee but a different one, it may get confusing. It may be best to name it by either the job title and/or classification code, but it is entirely up to the template owner.

25. If I have an employee with the job title 'Admin Assistant', but she has SAP duties, time keeping duties, and budget duties, do I just give her one title and include all of her responsibilities?

- a. **You may elect to name your template Admin Assistant because the name of the template** has no bearing on what will eventually become the template-her responsibilities that will be in SMART Goal format, and the Behavior Factors with which she performs all of those duties you mentioned. The naming of the template is to make



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it easier for the supervisor/manager to assign the template to one or many employees. The template name is only seen by the supervisor/manager who creates the template; thus the name is inconsequential to the overall content of the template and to whom it is assigned.

26. My HEAR Home Page does not correctly reflect my direct reports; why?

- a. There are several possible causes for this; first, it is possible that the supervisor/manager is not being correctly reflected as a supervisor/manager in SAP. Or, it could be that the supervisor/manager inherited employees from a supervisor/manager who just retired and SAP has not been updated to properly reflect the role change. Or, the supervisor/manager has neglected to complete the pre-requisite training(s) in the LMS. If the supervisor/manager has completed the 7-hr Process Training for Supervisors/Managers, but elected not to complete the 20-minute Web-based AP 3-20 Training, access to one's direct reports is restricted; if the supervisor/manager has completed neither the AP 3-20 or Process Training, access is restricted. In the instances where the issue is SAP-related, the supervisor/manager will need to address it with their department HR CRM (Client Relations Manager). If it is a training issue, it can only be remedied by completing the required training(s).

27. The fields with character limitations should have a visible character count.

- a. The application reflects the character limit for each field. While the Interim Application is robust in its ability to provide supervisors/managers a user-friendly, simplified method of assessing their employees, the application is that-an interim solution. A character count is being considered for future versions of the application. However, it is recommended that the user utilize Microsoft Word or the text-editing software of their choice to create their fields of data, and then copy/paste them into the application. This serves the purpose of a character count, as well as having the information retrievable in the event of a time-out or loss of power situation (as Microsoft Word will auto-save every 30-seconds and make data retrieval possible, whereas the HEAR Interim Application is unable to do so at this stage of development).

28. Will supervisors/managers be notified via email that the Reviewing Authority and/or Employee have signed their Plan/Assessment?

- a. As of now, there is no notification process that includes this action. RA's and supervisors/managers, as well as supervisors/managers and employees should be engaged in frequent conversation. A function of the HEAR way of assessing employees is to encourage two-way communication while eliminating or reducing secrecy. With this happening, all parties involved should be either casually or purposefully notified of digital signatures being or having been applied.

29. For employee 'X', one task is weighted at 40% of his overall evaluation. Can a way to add weights to evaluative tasks/behaviors be added to HEAR?



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- a. No. With weights, supervisors/managers were subjective in their assessment of employees. Realistically, can an employee be fairly assessed if something is 40% of their 'duty', but they only managed 36.7% of it? By what standard is that measured against? Too often, supervisors/managers would use this (weights) to round down rather than up as a measure of identifying failure rather than assessing success; thus, an employee would not be fairly assessed or would not achieve what he/she believed they earned. With HEAR, it is about two things: what is done, and how it is done-that's it. 50% of an employee's score derives from the what, and the other 50% derives from the how.
- 30. While in the Behavioral Factors drop-down, can they be copied/pasted into Word for better viewing?**
- a. Unfortunately, no. The BFs are cut off somewhat, but are available in their entirety in the HEAR Reference Manual, available for download at <http://www.houstontx.gov/hr/hear>
- 31. If the employee transfers to a new department, will the new supervisor have access to the previous HEAR template?**
- a. No. The creator of the template maintains ownership of it. A supervisor may elect on their own to run a template report and provide the new supervisor a copy of it if it would make the new supervisor's job easier somehow, but there is no obligation to do so on the part of the former supervisor. The new supervisor would only have access to previous assessments.
- 32. How many tasks can there be for new employees hired before next year's evaluation period begins?**
- a. The number of tasks is limited only by how many the supervisor/manager includes in the employee's SMART Goal. The purpose of SMART Goals is not to inundate the employee with every menial, meaningless 'task' that takes place in the course of a year, but to provide the employee a road map that aligns with the "Mayor's Priorities", is a fair share of the department's/shop's load of the city's work, and will reflect the employee's success as well as the success of the supervisor/manager. That said, however many 'tasks' the supervisor/manager loads into an employee's SMART Goal is how many the supervisor/manager will need to monitor throughout the year and accurately assess at the end of the year. If the employee fails to meet the SMART Goal established by the supervisor/manager and was concurred with by the Reviewing Authority, the verifiable comments made by the supervisor/manager will justify the scores accordingly.
- 33. Why is there no standard criterion for people doing the same thing?**
- a. The supervisor/manager establishes the standards required of the employees in his/her charge. The employee merely establishes a level of accomplishment. The supervisor/manager is aware of the department's goals, and delegates work to his/her



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employees accordingly. If there are multiple employees doing the same thing, it's up to the supervisor/manager to create a template that includes the 'standard criterion' that he/she wishes to have accomplished by his/her employee.

34. Why must an assessment be signed and saved before the scores are calculated?

- a. This is not necessarily the case. To see the scores calculated, all the supervisor/manager has to do is click the yellow 'Save HEAR Assessment' button, and the application will calculate the scores. If the assessment is signed and saved, scores can still be amended up until the employee digitally signs the assessment. Once this occurs, no changes can be made.

35. How do we change Kronos to reflect HEAR Assessments?

- a. Both Kronos and the HEAR Application are SAP-driven. If there are discrepancies or corrections that need to be made, they must be made with the appropriate departmental representative who maintains SAP.
- b. Additionally, there is no correlation between Kronos and HEAR, other than Kronos keeps track of time and place. How that relates to HEAR is that if an employee is being assessed on Attendance & Punctuality, being excessively late or having multiple unscheduled absences could have a negative impact on an assessment.

36. Current EPE Plans have different weights for different tasks. The HEAR Application doesn't allow us to weigh tasks. How do we get existing EPE (May 1, 2012 – April 30, 2013) in the new HEAR Application? The weights will mean that the employee would get different scores depending on which application was used.

- a. Current plans that were created using Performance Impact should have been downloaded and saved for easy access and use for when the impending HEAR Application was made available, or they should have been printed. In either case, the Plan(s) will be entered into the new HEAR Interim Application *verbatim, AS-IS*. While there are aspects of PI that no longer exist in the HEAR Application, such as weights, the Plans will be put into the new application as they are. Weights are no longer a consideration, and supervisors/managers are relieved of that burden. However, supervisors/managers will have to assess all of what the employees were being expected to do, just without worrying whether the employee did 16% of this, 32% of that. It will now be a matter of assessing whether the employee was Exceptional, Exceeded Expectations, Met Expectations, fell Below Expectations, or Needs Improvement—all of which will be justified by the supervisor's/manager's comments.

37. If a template is assigned to an employee already, but the duties of that employee change, will the edit button work in changing the template applied to that particular employee?

- a. Only if the employee has not applied his/her signature and saved the Plan. Once an employee signs/saves his/her Plan, it can no longer be edited.

38. Why is there nowhere for an employee to explain why he/she is refusing to sign?



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- a. There is. There is a space for employees to enter their own comments, and it is actually encouraged that they make comments even if they agree to sign their plan.

39. Why can progress reports not be maintained in the system for the duration of the assessment period?

- a. There is a coaching and counseling form that is in pdf format. There are only so many licenses for this particular Adobe product throughout the city. However, the form can be replicated as a Word Document or saved in Rich Text Format in Microsoft Word; once this is done, supervisors/managers can maintain this documentation wherever they see fit.

40. What is the thinking about using a “Mayor’s Priority” more than once with different SMART Goals Criteria Descriptions? For example, using the “Quality of Life” Priority more than once; technically this works. A follow-up to that question is if the same Mayor’s Priority is used more than once, does this count as one or as more than one to the HEAR Application? The reason for asking is that the SMART Goals PowerPoint presentation states that “The HEAR Assessment Tool will require that supervisors indicate at least (1) one, and up to (4) four SMART Goals to assess”.

- a. Each of the Mayor’s Priorities may be selected once to correlate with a SMART Goal. If there are multiple tasks that the employee will be assessed on, it’s in the best interest of the employee and the supervisor/manager for it to be clearly identified in the correlating SMART Goal. For example, it would not be prudent to put multiple items (tasks) under one SMART Goal and then create a second with many of the same things under a different Mayor’s Priority. All relative tasks should go with the correlating Priority. Additionally, supervisors will indeed need to create no less than one (1) SMART Goal for their employees, but no more than (4) four. The point of this is simplicity in leading, as well as a clear understanding of what an employee needs to accomplish to be successful.